



HEALTHY FOOD, SAFE FOOD PROJECT

EFNEP Listening Session Summary

July 20, 2015

BACKGROUND

The Healthy Food, Safe Food (HFSF) Project is a partnership between University of Minnesota Extension Center for Family Development and Minnesota Department of Health's (MDH's) Office of Statewide Health Improvement Initiatives (OSHII). HFSF's goal was to conduct a formative evaluation to aid in developing a plan of action to address regulatory barriers to improve access to healthy foods, while simultaneously maintaining and enhancing food safety. Between July 2015 and July 2016, the HFSF project team conducted a listening session, key informant interviews, and focus groups, followed by analysis and planning meetings.

PARTICIPANTS

Two supervisors and ten community nutrition educators from the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) at the University of Minnesota

LISTENERS

Tim Jenkins, Minnesota Department of Health; Mary Ann Van Cura, Independent Consultant; Mary Anne Casey, Krueger and Associates, LLC

WHAT RULES, REGULATIONS, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES HINDER MAKING THE HEALTHY FOOD CHOICE THE EASY CHOICE?

Comments Grouped by Location

K-12 Schools and Related Places

Listening session participants offered the following examples of rules, regulations, policies, and practices hindering the ability to serve healthy foods to K-12 students:

- Short lunch periods. Because of short lunch periods, students:
 - Choose foods that can be assembled and eaten quickly.
 - Don't choose salads because they take too long to assemble and eat.
- School menus that include less healthful foods. Examples include:
 - Chocolate milk
 - Foods with excessive chemicals or added sugars
 - Processed cheese



- Canned fruits and vegetables
- Some types of wheat bread that are not truly healthy (the health value of wheat bread varies by product)
- Vending machines stocked with unhealthy choices. These machines are difficult to :
 - Eliminate because they help finance sports or other programs.
 - Modify because the vending companies have contracts with the schools.
- Policies prohibiting sharing home-made foods at school because of safety concerns. Listening session participants made the following observations:
 - Parents send store-bought packaged foods or bakery items that are often unhealthy instead of healthy, homemade treats and snacks to school.
 - Letting parents prepare healthy treats and snacks, including raw fruits and vegetables, at school kitchens would address the problem just described. Besides providing healthy foods to kids, this practice would help parents save money because they wouldn't have to buy more expensive ready-made treats or snacks.
- Policies and practices that result in serving unhealthy foods at special events. Listening session participants made the following observations:
 - Schools sometimes partner with businesses on events, even when the businesses provide unhealthy foods at those events.
 - A common example of the preceding is a pizza party for students and staff featuring products provided by a business co-sponsor.
- Limited food options for students in after-school programs. As a result:
 - Students may have to rely on vending machines that don't include healthy foods.
 - Students then buy unhealthy foods from the vending machines to satisfy hunger.
- No nutrition education in the school's curricula.

Centers for Adult Education

Listening session participants offered examples of rules, regulations, policies, and practices hindering the ability to serve healthy foods to students at colleges, career schools, and other centers for adult education; examples include:

- Lack of cafeterias that could serve healthy meals.
- Lack of refrigeration or a place to store lunches from home.
- Vending machines with unhealthy foods that students patronize for lack of other options.

Farmers Markets

Listening session participants offered examples of rules, regulations, policies, and practices hindering the ability to widen access to farmers markets; examples include:

- The cost of setting up equipment to accept EBT cards is prohibitive for some producers.
- Many people lack convenient or affordable transportation to farmers markets.

Grocery Stores

Listening session participants said most grocery stores stock too many unhealthy processed and packaged foods compared with healthy fresh or frozen foods.

Corner Stores and Convenience Stores

Listening session participants offered the following observations about corner stores and convenience stores:

- Most corner stores and convenience stores sell predominantly unhealthy foods. Participants said these stores should offer more natural, fresh foods, more frozen fruits and vegetables, and fewer packaged, processed foods.
- Large companies that sell unhealthy foods will be afraid to lose money if they start to sell only healthy foods to corner stores and convenience stores.

Factories, Offices, and Other Workplaces

Listening session participants offered the following observations about factories, offices, and other workplaces relative to the provision of healthy foods:

- Some workplaces often sell unhealthy, prepackaged sandwiches to employees.
- As a result, workers do not have control over the food they get at these workplaces, unless they bring food from home.

Food Shelves

Listening session participants noted that numerous food shelves stock foods from one distributor that provides many processed and unhealthy foods.

Comments Grouped by Regulatory and Government Sectors

Food Safety Regulations

Listening session participants said food safety regulations limit healthy food options and offered two examples:

- A certain discount movie theater sells only packaged food because it doesn't have the right food license to offer fresh, healthier choices. Packaged foods tend to have preservatives and lower-quality ingredients.
- School treats must be pre-packaged.

Federal Government

Listening session participants observed that the federal government allows the sale of unhealthy foods. They said the government should take a stronger role widening access to healthy, affordable foods.

Participants also noted that other countries make stronger efforts to minimize production of unhealthy foods. For example, Mexico requires manufacturers to use sugar, rather than high fructose corn syrup, in soft drinks. Participants recommended that the federal government reduce corn and sugar subsidies and start subsidizing growing fruits and vegetables. They also recommended that the federal government:

- Require listing the percent of daily value (DV%) of sugar per serving on nutrition labels.
- Clarify confusing nutrition messaging.
- Create more TV and billboard ads for healthy foods. For example, ads for Cuties (clementines) have created a demand among children.
- Eliminate USDA funding requirements that limit what EFNEP can do. (For example, EFNEP focuses on the family, which limits programming for youth outside the family context.)


WHAT ARE OTHER BARRIERS TO MAKING THE HEALTHY FOOD CHOICE THE EASY CHOICE?

- Lack of public interest in making healthy food choices.
- Lack of money among consumers to buy healthy foods.
- Lack of time among consumers to prepare healthy foods.
- Many consumers not knowing what the healthy choice is.
- Where people live can limit their healthy choices.
- Lack of transportation.
- Peer pressure among young people to eat unhealthy foods. For example, one parent included [whole] wheat bread in a lunch she sent to school with her son. Her son was embarrassed to say he had [whole] wheat bread, so he said he had “chocolate bread.”

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO CHANGING RULES, REGULATIONS, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES?

Listening session participants said barriers that hinder their work to change rules, regulations, policies, and practices that hinder access to healthy foods center on *not*:

- Feeling that you can make a difference.
- Feeling like it is part of your job — not owning the problem.
- Knowing how to navigate the system. (How can I cause change?)
- Knowing how to get school districts to help promote safe, healthy foods before, during, and after school?
- Knowing how to change vending machine rules for public spaces? (Who can change that?)

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- Knowing how to empower clients to work together to create change.
 - Having a place to call — a resource center — that would help consumers create change or take on the responsibility for creating the change, e.g., at the federal level.

For more information about the Healthy Food, Safe Food Project, including summaries of other focus groups and key informant interviews, visit z.umn.edu/hfsf.

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Washington, D.C. 20250-9410

2. **Fax:** 202-690-7442

3. **Email:** program.intake@usda.gov

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For any other information dealing with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) issues, persons should either contact the USDA SNAP Hotline Number at 1-800-221-5689, which is also in Spanish or call the MN Food HelpLine at 1-888-711-1151.

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